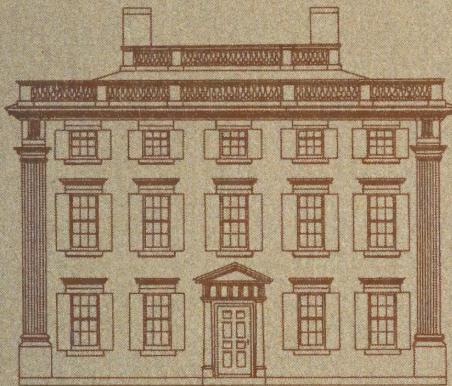
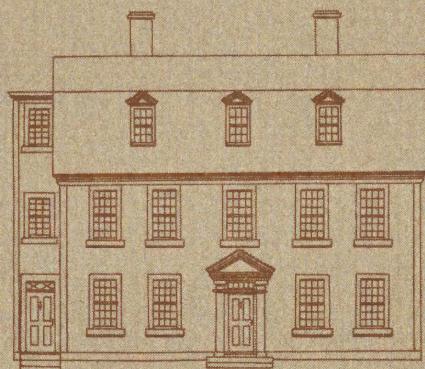


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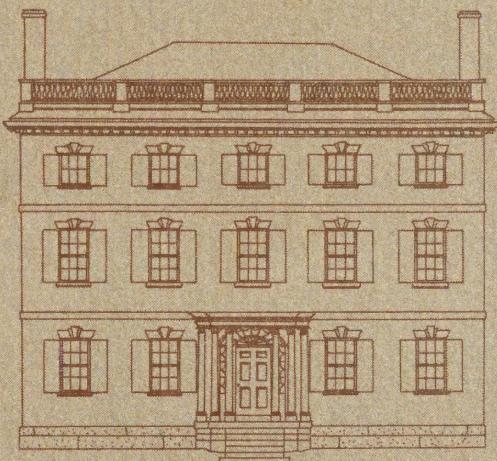
## Historic House Booklet Series



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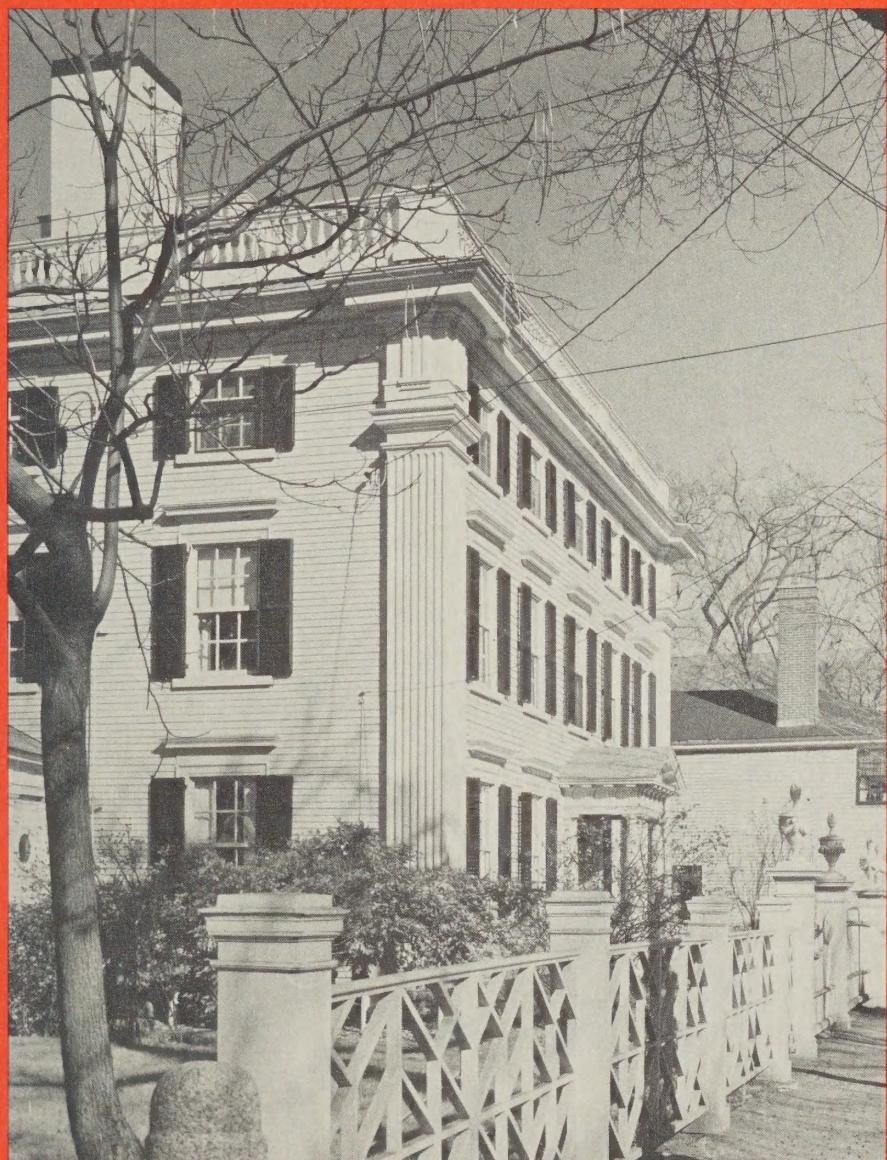
EDITED BY

Anne Farnam and Bryant F. Tolles, Jr.

Essex Institute, Salem, Massachusetts  1978



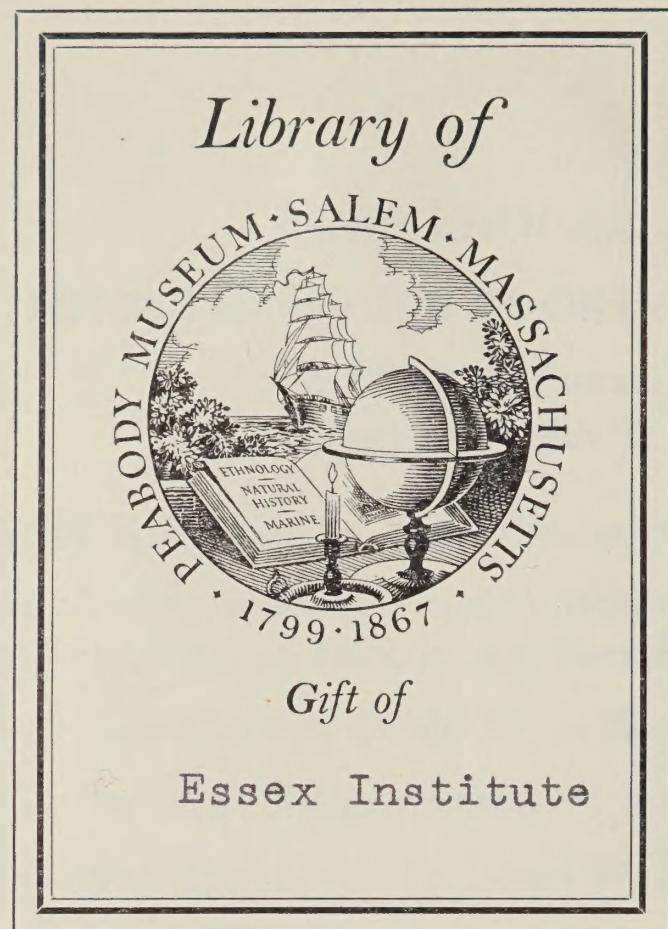
# THE PEIRCE-NICHOLS HOUSE



BY GERALD W. R. WARD

Essex Institute · Salem · Massachusetts

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1978



*Available individually or as a boxed set*

*Publication expenses have been generously supported by a grant from the  
McCarthy Family Foundation  
Charity Fund, Boston*

**COVER ILLUSTRATION:** The Peirce-Nichols House (1782, etc.), 80 Federal Street, Salem, south front facade. *Photograph by Samuel Chamberlain, ca. 1960.*

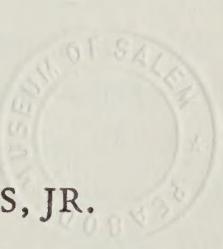
# The Peirce-Nichols House

Historic House Booklet Number Four



BY GERALD W. R. WARD

FOREWORD BY BRYANT F. TOLLES, JR.



Essex Institute · Salem · Massachusetts · 1976

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## Foreword

FOUNDED in 1848 by the merging of the Essex Historical Society (incorporated in 1821) and the Essex County Natural History Society (incorporated in 1836), the Essex Institute is one of America's oldest and most venerable regional historical societies. The Institute is supported almost entirely by private funds, and is composed of the James Duncan Phillips research library, a museum of American fine and decorative arts, and a group of seven period houses, six of which are open to the public. The Institute's collections include books, pamphlets, periodicals, graphic materials, furniture, paintings, and other decorative and historic objects associated with the civil history and the people of Essex County, Massachusetts, since the early seventeenth century. Through its varied treasures, collected over many generations, the Essex Institute is uniquely able to recount the life and culture of one of the most historically important areas in the northeastern United States.

Of its many fascinating possessions and programs, the Essex Institute has been perhaps most widely associated with the maintenance and interpretation of its historic house properties. One of the nation's first private organizations to enter the field of historic preservation, the Institute acquired and relocated its first historic house property—the John Ward House (1684)—in 1910, and has added to its collection of representative local domestic architecture over the years since. Today, the Institute boasts a nationally significant group of historic dwellings which span sequentially the history of residential architecture in Salem from the era of its early settlement and growth in the seventeenth century to the mid-Victorian period.

Three years ago, under the guidance of my predecessor, David B. Little, a project was initiated to research and compile an updated series of illustrated articles treating each of the Institute's houses. From January 1974 to April 1976 these articles, written by Boston University doctoral

candidates Gerald W. R. Ward and Barbara M. Ward, appeared individually in the Institute's quarterly *Historical Collections*. Now, thanks to a generous grant from the McCarthy Family Foundation Charity Fund, it is possible to make the Ward articles, expanded and supplemented with other material, available in reasonably priced pamphlets for general distribution.

None of this, of course, could have been possible without the painstaking efforts of the authors; the museum and library staff; my assistant, Katherine W. Richardson; and my coeditor, Institute curator Anne Farnam. We hope that the readers of these pamphlets will profit educationally from them and will experience the same enjoyment from the subject matter as did those of us involved in the editorial process. The printed word or the photograph cannot do complete justice, however, to the houses themselves; they and their rich contents must be directly experienced for one to appreciate their merit as documents of the American past.

BRYANT F. TOLLES, JR.  
*Director, Essex Institute*

#### AUTHOR

GERALD W. R. WARD was awarded an A.B. degree, *cum laude*, with a concentration in American national government, from Harvard University in 1971. Presently he is a doctoral candidate in the American and New England Studies Program at Boston University, where the emphasis of his studies is on American art and architecture. During the summers of 1973 and 1974 Mr. Ward was a National Endowment for the Humanities Museum Fellow at the Essex Institute, at which time he researched and compiled articles for this historic house booklet series. During the academic year 1973-74 he was involved in practicum courses at the Institute as a cataloguer of the wallpaper collection and as an editorial assistant. In 1974-75 he was an N.E.H. Fellow in the Garvan and Related Collections office of the Yale University Art Gallery. Currently he is working on his doctoral thesis.

## The Peirce-Nichols House

PHIL M. RILEY and Mary Harrod Northend, early writers on Salem architecture, made the interesting point many years ago that the Peirce-Nichols House at 80 Federal Street in Salem is of "no particular historical interest," because it boasts "no important association with historic events in national affairs." Nevertheless, they noted that the house possesses "human interest of a genuine sort, drawn from the vicissitudes and disappointments, as well as the joys, of its successive tenants," and "the pathos of its romantic memories makes direct appeal to all."<sup>1</sup> While we might argue with these pioneering writers on their first point, there is no question but what the Peirce-Nichols House has had as interesting a social history as any house in New England.

Furthermore, the house, built in the early 1780s, is the first major work of Samuel McIntire, "the architect of Salem," and is widely recognized as one of the outstanding houses of the early Federal period.<sup>2</sup> Parts of the house were remodeled by McIntire in 1801, thus combining under one roof superb examples of his Georgian and Adamesque styles. With the exception of a short period, successive generations of Peirces and Nicholases lived in the house, many of them remarkable characters in their own right. Fortunately, the house was largely intact when it was received by the Essex Institute for preservation in 1917, as the second member of the Institute's growing family of houses. The house has been restored and furnished with many Peirce-Nichols family objects, which give an added dimension to its appearance and interpretation. Further restoration of the house will be aided by an 1827 inventory of

1. Frank Cousins and Phil M. Riley, *The Colonial Architecture of Salem* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1916), p. 78, and Mary Harrod Northend, *Historic Doorways of Old Salem* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1926), p. 32.

2. The best account of the Peirce-Nichols House is by Fiske Kimball, in various parts of his *Mr. Samuel McIntire, Carver: The Architect of Salem* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1940), especially pp. 8-9, and 58-59.

the goods owned by Jerathmiel Peirce which has recently come to light and is printed here for the first time.

Much has been written concerning the Peirce-Nichols House and its occupants in numerous architectural histories and family memoirs and genealogies. It is historically useful to bring together and summarize this voluminous and scattered information in order to present a rounded picture of the social and architectural history of the house.

## I

Jerathmiel Peirce, the builder and first owner of the Peirce-Nichols House, lived a long and varied life.<sup>3</sup> He was born in Charlestown, Massachusetts, the son of Jerathmael and Rebecca (Hurd) Peirce, and he spent his early years in that town learning the trade of leather dresser. By February of 1772, he had moved to Salem, where he married Sarah Ropes (1752–1796) in that year.<sup>4</sup> Benjamin, the first of their nine children and the first of three to bear that name, was born in December of 1772, but died within a few days. Joseph A., born in 1774, went to sea and passed away in the West Indies at the age of nineteen. The second Benjamin, born in 1776, did not live to see his second birthday. Three weeks after his death, Sarah gave birth to another son, and he too was named Benjamin. Despite his seemingly cursed name, this Benjamin (1778–1831) went on to be a Salem merchant, and eventually became librarian of Harvard College. On November 24, 1780, Jerathmiel's first daughter was born and christened Sally—more of her anon.

Jerathmiel joined a volunteer company of militia in the early years of

3. Biographical information on Jerathmiel Peirce and his family can be found in Susan Nichols Pulsifer's book, *Witch's Breed: The Peirce-Nichols Family of Salem* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Dresser, Chapman and Grimes, 1967); Benjamin F. Browne, "An Account of Salem Common, and the Levelling of the Same in 1802, with Short Notices of the Subscribers," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 4 (June 1862), 138; and Frederick Clifton Peirce, *Peirce Genealogy . . .* (Worcester, Massachusetts, 1880), pp. 52–53. Much manuscript material relevant to his life is contained in the libraries of the Essex Institute and the Peabody Museum of Salem, primarily in the various Nichols Family papers. Some of Jerathmiel's letters are in the Ellis collection at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, and other important material may lie as yet undiscovered in the Peirce papers at Harvard. There is considerable variation of the spelling of "Jerathmiel" in old records. The editors have endeavored to be as consistent as possible, using the form "Jerathmiel" when referring to the builder of the Peirce-Nichols House, but allowing variations of the name as it is spelled within quoted materials.

4. Jerathmiel's wedding date and the birthdates of his children are given in the appropriate volumes of the printed Salem vital records.

the Revolution, and went on an expedition from Salem to New York in 1777.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, Jerathmiel survived the Revolution (which his brother did not), and by 1779 was pursuing his leather-dressing practice in Salem. By September of that year, he had purchased a one-sixth share in the ship *Friendship*,<sup>6</sup> and had embarked on the shipping career which was to give him the means to build the Peirce-Nichols House. He soon entered into partnership with Aaron Waitt (c. 1742–1830) and their firm of Peirce and Waitt became one of the largest India traders in the country.<sup>7</sup> In 1781, Peirce offered for sale at his store near the North Bridge the following assortment of goods:

An elegant India Paper Hanging of the newest fashion,  
Compleat Set of Accompt Books,  
Types for marking Linen,  
Iron Chests—ditto Stoves—Iron doors and window outside  
shutters.

ALSO,

Rider on the Bible, with Cuts, 3 Vol.  
Lives of the Admirals, 4 Vol.  
Gibson's [sic] History of the Roman Empire, 3 Vol.  
Political and Gentleman's Magazine.  
Postlethwait's compleat Dictionary of Trade and Commerce,  
2 Vol. Folio.

Jacob's Law Dictionary, Folio.

Blackston's Commentaries, 4 Vol.

Burrow's Reports, 4 Vol. fol.—Bulley's Niss Prices, 410.

Erskine's Institutes of the Law of Scotland.

Clark's Practice of the Court of Admiralty.

Arbitrator or the Law of Award.

Wood's Conveyances—Cunningham's Law,

5. Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, pp. 44–46. While camped at "Scarsdale Manor Near White Plains" Jerathmiel wrote a touching letter home to his wife which Mrs. Pulsifer has reprinted on pp. 46–47.

6. See a bill of September 3, 1779, in the Ward Family Manuscripts, Volume 2, leaf 61, Essex Institute.

7. A short biography of Aaron Waitt (or Wait, Waite, Waitte) is in Brown, "Salem Common," p. 138. The Essex Institute owns a small number of Peirce and Waitt Commercial Papers, and Jerathmiel's account book for the period 1796–1802.

Every Man his own Lawyer,—with sundry other Books, and other Articles not enumerated.<sup>8</sup>

Jerathmiel owned the schooner *Betsey*, as well as an interest in the *Friendship*, and Peirce and Waitt owned other ships, including the *Eliza* and *Mount Vernon*. The voyages made by these ships made Jerathmiel a wealthy man in the years following the Revolution.

In 1779, Jerathmiel purchased from the heirs of Benjamin Gerrish the land on which the Peirce-Nichols House was built. This land cost £1133, and was bounded

south on the New Street [now Federal Street] there measuring six poles, West on Peele's land there measuring ten poles six links, North on the flats by the north river & running as the wall stands and there measuring six poles seventeen links, east on land of Lindal's heirs & there measuring eleven poles fifteen links & running as the fence stood to the street. . . .<sup>9</sup>

Later Peirce acquired two small lots to the east of this land which squared off his house lot.<sup>10</sup>

The Peirce-Nichols House, according to family and local tradition, was built in 1782. Fiske Kimball accepted this date for the most part, although he was careful to state in his *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* that the only safe date to assign the house is "after 1779,"<sup>11</sup> and no more precise date can be provided today with confidence. The earliest statements we have on record concerning the date of the building of the house come in 1862, and they contradict each other. Benjamin F. Browne, in a biographical sketch of Jerathmiel Peirce which appeared in the *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, gives the date as 1782.<sup>12</sup> This date is repeated by other authors writing in

8. *Salem Gazette*, October 25, 1781. Nancy McClelland comments on the "India Paper Hanging" mentioned in this advertisement in her *Historic Wallpapers from Their Inception to the Introduction of Machinery* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1924), p. 249.

9. Essex County Registry of Deeds, Book 136, leaf 207. A "Title to Nichols Estate" was prepared by the attorney William D. Chappelle in 1916 and is on file at the Essex Institute. The intricacies and nuances of the progressive ownership of the Peirce-Nichols House can be followed in this thorough title search.

10. Essex County Registry of Deeds, Book 139, leaf 159; Book 175, leaf 28.

11. (New York: Scribner's, 1922), p. 267.

12. Brown, "Salem Common," p. 138. Fiske Kimball felt that the earliest statement of this date did not come until 1876 (Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 58).

1865<sup>13</sup> and 1876.<sup>14</sup> However, in a letter by Mrs. George Nichols, Jr., dated July 4, 1862, the author, a granddaughter of Jerathmiel, states that her father and stepmother, George Nichols and Betsey (Peirce) Nichols, "sat side-by-side as in their usual custom at the middle of the long table spread in the large East room of the Spacious house on Federal Street built by his wife's father [i.e., Jerathmiel Peirce] seventy-eight years ago," or in 1784.<sup>15</sup>

Even the Salem tax records, which are somewhat sketchy for this period, are little help. Jerathmiel was assessed for a "2/3 House" in polls taken in May of 1781 and November of 1782. There are no listings for Jerathmiel in 1783, but the 1784-1785 list assesses him for a complete "House," and the Peirce-Nichols House must have been completed by this time.<sup>16</sup>

The connection of Samuel McIntire with the house is not as yet supported by any documentary evidence. Fiske Kimball, however, felt that the attribution to McIntire rested "securely" on oral tradition, and was reinforced by the house's "coherence of style with documented works."<sup>17</sup> Scholars have universally accepted the house as one of McIntire's earliest and finest works.

During the first phase of work, construction was completed on the exterior, the porches, the woodwork of the west parlor and chamber, the side stairs, and probably the stable.<sup>18</sup> This work, in Kimball's words, "would not betray the fact that they had not been executed even a generation earlier."<sup>19</sup> The young McIntire's source of inspiration for his details was a volume by Batty Langley, probably his *City and Country Builder's and Workman's Treasury of Designs*, first published in Eng-

13. See the *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 7 (August 1865), 165.

14. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 58, makes reference to another article in the *Essex Institute Historical Collections* for 1876 which gives the date of the house as 1782.

15. Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, p. 415.

16. These tax records may be seen on microfilm at the Essex Institute. The originals are still owned by the city and are currently unavailable.

17. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 58.

18. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 58. Comments on the stable can be found on pp. 39 and 59 of the same work.

19. Kimball, *Domestic Architecture*, p. 141; other comments in his *McIntire*, pp. 8-9. Other remarks on the "retardataire naïveté" of these early parts of the house can be found in Alan Gowans, *Images of American Living: Four Centuries of Architecture and Furniture as Cultural Expression* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1964), p. 234, and Oliver Larkin, *Samuel McIntire: A Bicentennial Symposium 1757-1957* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1957), p. 106.

land in 1740.<sup>20</sup> McIntire relied on this out-of-date pattern book in carving the mantel and overmantel in the west parlor, and for the details of the Doric order in the porches and pilasters of the exterior. As a consequence, these portions of the house do not appear to differ greatly from houses built earlier in the eighteenth century.

The house stands three stories in height, with bold corner pilasters, and a foreshortened third story which demonstrates McIntire's sound sense and understanding of proportion. An interesting but probably fanciful tale related by a great-granddaughter of Jerathmiel states that during the building of the house Jerathmiel "complained of the fact that the windows in the third story were smaller than in the first or second." McIntire knew what he was about, and simply told Jerathmiel quietly that "the proportion was better as he had planned and the windows remained."<sup>21</sup>

The great corner pilasters are practically the only surface ornamentation on the exterior. The windows are capped simply, and the front and west side porches are restrained and dignified. An unusual touch (for McIntire) is the window with an arched head in the rear of the second floor hall.<sup>22</sup> A balustrade surrounds the hip roof. The effect of the house is most impressive as one rounds the corner of Federal and North Streets and is confronted with its tall, solid, mass rising above the trees. McIntire's youthful effort indeed merits its characterization as "one of the outstanding houses remaining from the early Federal period."<sup>23</sup>

From his roof and rear windows, Jerathmiel could watch his ships sail up the North River and dock virtually in his back yard. His fortune continued to grow in the 1780s and 1790s, although his personal life was not without its share of sorrow. It is believed that his first child to be born in the new house was named Elizabeth, and she died a few months after her birth in February of 1783. The same tragic sequence of events happened with the birth of the second Elizabeth in 1785. Finally, the third Elizabeth (1787-1864), known as Betsey, survived. His ninth and final child, Henry (1789-1863), also survived to maturity, and be-

20. Kimball, *McIntire*, pp. 58-59; see also p. 144.

21. Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, p. 379.

22. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 33.

23. Marshall B. Davidson, *The American Heritage History of Notable American Houses* (New York: American Heritage, 1971), p. 141. See also Talbot F. Hamlin, *The American Spirit in Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. 94.

came a successful businessman. In 1796, Jerathmiel's wife, Sarah, died, at the age of forty-four, and Jerathmiel apparently transferred his affection and emotional dependence to his daughters Sally and Betsey.

The marriage of Sally to George Nichols (1778–1865) provided the occasion which makes the Peirce-Nichols House the most important surviving work by Samuel McIntire—the remodeling of the hall and east parlor and chamber in his Adamesque style. George and Sally had been engaged for several years, and finally the long awaited event occurred. In George's own words,

the ceremony took place on the 22nd of November, 1801, on Sunday evening. We were married by Rev. Dr. Hopkins, in my Father Peirce's great eastern room, which was finished and furnished only a short time before. Aunt Adams was buried from the same room, only three days before.<sup>24</sup>

Only the immediate families were present at the wedding, and the ceremony had quite an effect on the widowed Jerathmiel. A family tradition relates that

Jerathmiel, overcome with a feeling of loneliness in parting with his much-loved older daughter, suggested to the younger Betsey that she walk with him in the fresh air of a large unfinished room at the top of the house. As they walked he told Betsey that she should have as beautiful a wedding as that of her sister, and that this room should then be as exquisitely carved and finished for her.

Betsey, however, clung to her father, replying that she would never leave him, married or single. "Will you take a vow to that effect?" asked her troubled father, and she replied "I, Betsey, will never leave my father." The years passed, and Betsey, vivacious and beautiful, was sought by many young men. But on the eve of her matrimony . . . she quarreled with her lover. She was not married until in her older years she married her brother-in-law, George Nichols, after Sally's death.<sup>25</sup>

24. Martha Nichols (ed.), *George Nichols, Salem Shipmaster and Merchant* (Salem: Salem Press, c. 1912), pp. 47–48.

25. Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, p. 398.

Betsey and George, married in 1836, would eventually live together in the Peirce-Nichols House.

These 1801 alterations have traditionally been attributed to McIntire, and the east parlor is a superb example of his handling of the neoclassical.<sup>26</sup> Most of the ornamentation in this room is plaster composition, including the classical figure of Plenty in the center panel of the mantel, and the "muse with a lyre" in the end panels.<sup>27</sup> These details have been described at length elsewhere,<sup>28</sup> and it is important here to stress only the contrast between this east, Adamesque parlor and the Georgian parlor across the hall. The presence of these rooms and their respective chambers makes the Peirce-Nichols House a veritable textbook of the evolution of McIntire's architectural career and the changing taste of the period.

A front fence with classical urns was built as part of the remodeling project,<sup>29</sup> and it has been suggested that the one-story addition in the rear courtyard of the house was also added at this time.<sup>30</sup>

Business continued to flourish for Jerathmiel until the War of 1812 in which, like other Salem merchants, he suffered serious setbacks. Unlike John Gardner, who was forced to give up his new McIntire house, Jerathmiel managed to hold on to his home during these difficult years. Matters were not helped by a small fire which broke out on August 6, 1815. On that Sunday morning,

divine service was interrupted by an alarm, because Jerathmiel Peirce's house in Federal Street and two others near it had their roofs on fire from a chimney in the first one. Though the peril was great from a high wind, the flames were extinguished with but little damage.<sup>31</sup>

A series of misfortunes and mismanagements finally took their toll, and by 1826 Jerathmiel was ruined financially and was obliged to sell everything he owned.

On July 19, 1826, Jerathmiel was forced to surrender to his creditors

26. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 58.

27. Kimball, *Domestic Architecture*, pp. 256-257.

28. For example, see Cousins and Riley, *Colonial Architecture of Salem*, pp. 155-158.

29. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 59.

30. Cousins and Riley, *Colonial Architecture of Salem*, pp. 80-81.

31. Joseph B. Felt, *Annals of Salem*, second edition (Salem: W. and S. B. Ives, 1845, 1849), I, 379.

all the Mansion house and land under and appurtenant to the same now occupied by the said Jerathmeel Peirce, together with the store, the wharves and other erections and buildings thereon.

He also relinquished two lots on Bridge Street, a third on the south bank of the North River, and another lot near the North Bridge. His pews in the South Meeting House were forfeited, as was his stock in the Salem Marine Insurance Company, the Essex Fire and Marine Insurance Company, the Salem and Danvers Aqueduct Company, the Commercial Bank, the Salem Turnpike and Chelsea Bridge Corporation, the Beverly Bank, the Boston Marine Insurance Company, the Salem Iron Factory Company, the Salem Lead Manufactory, and the Essex Marine Railway Company. Jerathmiel also gave up his interest in the ships *Herald* and *Friendship*. It was agreed that Jerathmiel could live in the Peirce-Nichols House free of charge until after its sale at public auction.<sup>32</sup>

The house was advertised for sale in the *Salem Gazette* beginning on June 1, 1827, and was described as

That Valuable Homestead, consisting of a Dwelling House, Store, and Wharf, with the land under and adjoining, bounded on the south by Federal Street, west by land of Robert Peele, north by the North River, and east by land of Joseph Sprague.

On June 23, 1827, George Stuart Johonnot of Salem purchased the house for \$5,240.<sup>33</sup> Jerathmiel and his daughter Betsey were finally forced to leave, and they went to live with George and Sally Nichols at their home in the western end of the Tontine block on Warren Street.<sup>34</sup>

And at about the same time, all of Jerathmiel's furniture was also put up for sale at public auction. George Nichols wrote to his son on the morning of June 29, 1827, and concluded with: ". . . As the sale of the family furniture is to commence immediately after breakfast, I must close with best regards."<sup>35</sup> In the *Salem Gazette* for that day appeared the following notice, placed by George Nichols, auctioneer:

32. These forfeitures are described in an indenture recorded in the Essex County Registry of Deeds, Book 242, leaf 58.

33. Essex County Registry of Deeds, Book 244, leaf 266.

34. See the notes by Martha Nichols in *George Nichols*, p. 85.

35. Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, p. 257.

Valuable Furniture  
At Auction

---

THIS DAY, at 9 and 2 O'clock

Will be sold at Public Auction, all the Furniture of a Gentleman  
breaking up house-keeping at the House near the east end of  
Federal street.

BRUSSELS, Turkey and Kidderminster Carpets, Fire Sets, 1 set  
of Rees' Cyclopedias, 1 Piano Forte, 1 Clock, Mahogany, English  
Fancy and Common Chairs, 2 large drawing room mirrors, 2  
Convex drawing room and 2 pier Mirrors, several elegant and  
common Looking Glasses, Dining, Card, and other Mahogany  
Tables, Bureaus, Sofas, Mahogany and other Bedsteads, Bed and  
Window Curtains, Beds, Table and Bed Linen, Blankets, Quilts,  
Silver and Silver plated Ware, Canton Dining and Tea Sets, 1  
elegant French China Tea Set, Glass Ware, Common Dining  
and Tea Sets, Ivory handle and common Knives and Forks,  
Elegant Copperplate Prints. A large assortment of Kitchen Fur-  
niture, Garden and Carpenter's Tools, Counting Room and  
Store Furniture, 2 excellent Spy Glasses, 1 ullage bbl. Molasses,  
1 bbl. Oil Stones, Old Casks, Boxes, Barrels, Gun apparatus,  
and a great variety of other articles.

ALSO—A number of Plants in boxes.

While this notice provides some information on Jerathmiel's furnishings  
in the Peirce-Nichols House, we fortunately have an even more detailed  
room-by-room listing of his goods, apparently taken at the time of  
their sale, perhaps by George Nichols. This document, which is pre-  
served in Box 10, Folder 3, of the Nichols Family Papers at the Phillips  
Library of the Peabody Museum of Salem, is published here with this  
institution's kind permission.

The inventory is written in a small notebook with unruled pages,  
measuring approximately 6 by 7 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches. It is entitled "Inventory of J.  
Peirce's House Furniture &c.," to which had been added in the same  
handwriting but different ink the note "sold in 1827." The goods were  
listed in an orderly, room-by-room arrangement, with each room as-  
signed a number, and this order has been preserved here. The listings  
for each room are generally preceded with a short editorial statement in  
brackets [] identifying the location of the room, and calling attention

to some of the more interesting items mentioned. Those items enclosed by parentheses () were crossed out in the manuscript. An asterisk (\*) precedes those few items which for some unknown reason were written in pencil. Illegible words are indicated by [illegible]. No spelling changes have been made. If there is a question concerning the spelling of a particular word, a [?] has been placed after the word.

Inventory of J. Peirce's House Furniture &c.  
sold in 1827

No. 1 *inner Kitchen*

[While we cannot be absolutely sure, this "inner" kitchen was probably located on the first floor, in the room on the northwest corner. This room apparently contained a large amount of china and crockery, two tables, and twelve chairs, but very little in the way of cooking equipment. It perhaps served as a family dining or breakfast room.]

[manuscript torn] of Nuts	11 Knives—6 Forks 1 Steel
weaving machines &c.	&
2 Tea Cannisters	2 knife trays
1 Gin Case	1 Bureau
1 Demijohn	6 Cups and 11 Saucers
2 pr. Fire Buckets	3 Cream Pots
4 Stove Pots & 1 (Spit Dish)	1 – 2 quart Pitcher
1 mahogany Tea Caddy	1 pr. brass Candlesticks
2 Lanterns & 1 Microscope	1 japan'd Waiter
Lot Cracked Crockery	2 China Fruit Baskets
2 pots Sweetmeats	1 " Bowl & Contents
2 pudding Dishes	4 Blacmange Shapes
1 Tea Caddy	(Pitcher of Sugar &c.)
Lot of Decanter Stands &c.	1 pr. Snuffers & Tray
7 coarse Towels	4 Dishes
4 Diaper Rollers	6 red edg'd Plates
9 ps. Crockery	4 ps. cracked blue Ware
18 edg'd Plates	1 Round Table & Cloth
6 " Dishes	1 Goblet & Bowl
11 white Plates	2 pr. Snuffers & Trays

1 Sugar Bowl & Cream Pot	1 Pocket Lantern
3 Flower Pots & Goblet	1 entry do.
1 plate Basket	1 set Candle Moulds
1 mahogany Table	6 common Chairs
1 pr. bellows	6 fancy Do.
1 muffin Iron	1 Warming Pan

*No. 2 Parlour*

[This room is the southwest, or Georgian, parlor on the first floor. The large amount of china listed here was probably stored at least in part in the china closet to the right of the mantel. About eighty pieces of glassware and over two hundred and fifty pieces of china are listed for this room alone, along with numerous tablecloths, napkins, and so on. Several small tables, rather than one large dining table, appear in this room, which functioned as the main dining room. Not included in the list are the gray on white tiles representing "Aesop's Fables" which surround the fireplace opening. Tradition maintains that these tiles were taken as booty from a British vessel by John Leach, commander of the *Brutus*, in 1780, and presented by him to his brother-in-law Jerathmiel Peirce. Similar tiles are in the parlor chamber, room no. 7.]

1 Turkey Carpet - 27 yds.	
1 Rug	
8 mahogany Chairs	
1 Clock	
1 picture—Alexander Hamilton	
1 Looking Glass	
1 pr. Brass Andirons & Shovel	
1 fire Screen	
1 pr. bellows	
2 urns.	
2 japan'd Coolers	
1 " Tea Caddy	
1 " tray & 6 ivory handle	
	knives & forks
3 quart fluted Decanters	
2 " fig'd Do.	

1 pint	Do.
1 Vinegar Cruet	
1 China flower Pot & Dish	
2 Salt Cellars	
9 Tumblers	
6 plain Wine & Jelly Glasses	
3 small Cruets	
1 Goblet	
1 mahogany Waiter	
9 large fig'd Wine Glasses	
8 cordial	Do.
13 plain Jelly	Do.
14 fig'd Jelly Glasses	
1 Japan'd Waiter	
1 mahogany 3 foot Table	
1 - 2 quart China mug blue	
4 China Salt Cellars	"
2 Sauce Tureens with dishes	[blue]
30 Custard Cups & 2 baskets	"
44 large flat China Plates	"
14 " deep "	Do. "
6 cake & Cheese	Do.
9 -2d- size flat	Do.
7 -2d- " deep	Do.
17 -3d- " flat	Do.
5 Pudding Dishes	
2 Large Tureens	
8 - 1st & 2d size Dishes	
6 - 3d " Do.	
11 - 4th & 5th "	Do.
1 Fish ———	Do.
3 Butter Boats	
18 Cups & 17 Saucers with handles	
16 Tea Cups & 8 Saucers	
11 bowls & Saucers	
(1 Sugar Bowl)	
1 - 4 foot mahogany Table & Cloth	
1 Red & white Tea Pot	

5 " " " Coffee Bowls & 6 Saucers  
 2 " " " Salt Cellars  
 1 " " " Punch Bowl  
 [manuscript torn] gilt Tea & Coffee Set- S.E.W.  
 [manuscript torn] Glass Bottles  
 [manuscript torn] n'd Waiter  
 [manuscript torn] Plated Tea Pot  
 1 painted Table  
 1 Table Cloth  
 6 Damask napkins  $1\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{8}$   
 1 Cotton Diaper Table Cloth  $2\frac{5}{8} \times 2$   
 1 Damask Do.  $2\frac{1}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$   
 1 Do. Do. Do.  
 1 Do. Do.  $2\frac{7}{8} \times 2\frac{3}{8}$   
 1 Do. Do. Do.  
 1 Do. Do.  $2\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$   
 1 Do. Do.  $2\frac{3}{8} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$   
 1 Do. Do.  $2\frac{1}{8} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$   
 1 Do. Do.  $3\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$   
 6 common napkins  
 1 Round Table  
 12 large ivory handle Knives & Forks  
 18 small Do.  
 1 Carver & Fork Do.  
 1 Knife Tray  
 1 blue breakfast Cloth  $1\frac{1}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{4}$   
 4 damask breakfast Cloths -  $1\frac{3}{8} \times 1\frac{1}{4}$   
 10 do. napkins -  $1\frac{1}{8} \times 1$   
 3 doz. Currant Wine  
 (\*)  $\frac{1}{2}$  doz. Claret Do.

### *Drawing Room No. 3*

[George Nichols and Sally Peirce were married in this southeast, or Adamesque, room on the first floor. The four window settees, and the two recessed ones, one on either side of the fireplace, were probably carved by McIntire for the wedding, and are still in their original positions today. The looking glasses are also still in their original locations at either end of the room, and may

have been imported from France. Interestingly, while a sofa is mentioned along with the settees, no chairs are recorded as having been in this room. Much of Jerathmiel's silver, including a coffeepot, teapot, cream pot, porringers, and butter boats, was apparently kept in this room.]

- 1 Brussels Carpet  $38\frac{1}{2}$  yds.
- 1 hearth Rug
- 1 Piano Forte & stool
- about 200 pages of Music
- 4 Pictures—England Ireland  
Scotland & Wales
- 1 Picture—Ballad Singers
- 2 Do. —Lost Child & Child Returned
- 1 Do. —Last Supper
- 4 Sets of Window Curtains
- 4 Window Settees  
2 Recess. Do. } patch cover'd
- 1 Sofa
- 1 largest Looking Glass
- 1 Pier or Chimney Do.
- 2 convex mirrors
- 1 Fire Set
- 1 Fire Board
- 3 Screens
- 25 blue Cups & Saucers with handles
- 1 japan'd Waiter
- 2 mahogany Card Tables
- 2 Alabaster Vases with Stands
- 2 " Obelisks with Do.
- 30 large China flat Plates
- 6 " Do. deep Do.
- 6 – 1st 2d & 3d size Dishes
- 1 set French China
- 2 large Waiters
- 1 small Tea Set
- 1 Do. Waiter
- 18 Jelly Mugs

4 glass Flower Pots  
1 pr. hight Plated Candlesticks  
1 Cream Bowl  
1 pr. short plated Candlesticks  
1 Castor  
1 mahogany 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  foot Table  
6 - 1st 2d & 3d size China Baskets  
1 white & gilt Tea & Coffee Set  
1 blue " " Do. Do.  
2 oval Waiters  
(12 chocolate bowls & 11 Saucers)  
(5 white gilt Cake Plates)  
1 plated Urn  
2 pr. plated Candlesticks  
1 " Dish Stand  
1 Wine Strainer  
1 plated Tea Pot  
2 " Salt Cellars  
1 " Tea Shovel  
2 Silver Cans wg 27 oz 3 dwt  
2 " Porringers 18" 19"  
1 " Tea Pot & Stand 16" 11"  
1 " Cream Pot 3 13"  
2 " Butter Boats & Ladles 23-11  
1 Castor 17-  
1 Strainer 3.8  
6 large Spoons Warner [?] 13.16  
6 plain Spoons wg 13 oz. 2  
4 large Do. Fig'd 9" 7  
4 dessert Do. Do. 5"-  
2 Do. Do. plain 1" 18  
1 Do. Do. Warner [?] 1" 5  
6 Tea Do. Do. 3" 8  
11 Do. Do. plain 5" 4  $\frac{1}{2}$   
3 Salt Do. 16  
1 pr. Sugar Tongs 1.7  
2 wine Labels " 12  
1 mahogany Table— 5  $\frac{1}{2}$   $\times$  4 feet

(Lot Piano Strings & tuning fork &c.)  
(\*) 1 silver Coffee Pot 39 oz.

*Lower Entry No. 4*

[This listing refers to the central hallway on the first floor, which was covered with mats and a small Brussels carpet. This list also reveals that the stairs were carpeted in 1827.]

5 Mats

9 Cane bottom Chairs with Cushions

1 Picture—Woodman

1 Do. —Dutton E. S. jugu [?]

4 Do. —Battle of the Nile

1 Settee (\*) 1 Sideboard

2 Chairs with Cushions

1 entry Lamp & apparatus

18 yds. Stair Carpeting

1 small Brussels Carpet 6 sq. yds.

*No. 5 Middle Entry*

[The second floor hallway.]

Entry Carpet  $22\frac{1}{4}$  sq. yds.

1 Sofa

1 picture—Cow Herd

1 " —Harriers

1 " —Market Girl

1 " —Fishing Boy

9 Chairs with Cushions

*No. 6 Drawing Room Chamber*

[This room is on the southeast side of the second floor, and is generally considered to be the master bedroom. The highpost mahogany bedstead listed here is attributed to McIntire and still remains in the room.]

1 Brussels Carpet —  $36\frac{1}{2}$  sq. yds.

6 mahogany Chairs with Cushions

1 " highpost Bedstead

1 set patch Bed Curtains. Counterpane

1 Down Bed Pillows & Bolster—44 lbs.  
 1 set window Curtains  
 1 mahogany pier Table  
 1 largest Looking Glass  
 1 Pier        Do.  
 1 brass Fire Set  
 2 pictures—Rustic Hours  
 1 Do. —Highland Piper  
 1 Do. —Town Lanes  
 1 Do. —Little Red Riding Hood  
 1 Do. —Margery 2 Shoes.

*No. 7 Parlour Chamber*

[The room on the southwest side of the second floor, with Georgian detail. Used as a bedroom, many linens were also stored here. The “6 white gilt Chairs with Cushions” have disappeared.]

1 Brussels Carpet – 24 sq. yds.	3 "	Pillow Cases
1 mahogany highpost Bedstead	12 coarse Linen Sheets	
Lot Green Tassels & Fringe	5 – 2d quality Linen Do.	
1 set Bed Curtains	3 – fine        "        Do.	
3 " Window Do.	10 fine Linen Pillow Cases	
6 white gilt Chairs with Cushions	1 Cotton Toilet Dress	
1 Looking Glass	1 set Bed Furniture	
1 Fire Set	1 " muslin Toilet dress	
2 pr. Cotton Sheets	3 Toilets	
	2 Chambers	

*No. 8 North west middle Chamber*

[This room is on the second, or “middle,” floor. Perhaps used as a small office or study, this carpeted room contained only ten chairs, a table, and a desk.]

1 Kidderminster Carpet – 23 yds.	2 low    Do.
1 Looking Glass	2 rocking Do.
1 Toilet    Do.	1 Desk
1 mahogany Table	1 pr. brass Andirons
6 common chairs	(1 Fire [?])



Peirce-Nichols House, 80 Federal Street, Salem, front elevation. *Essex Institute photo, 1940.*



View from the southwest. *Photograph by Charles Darling, 1913.*



Rear courtyard, showing one-story addition, right, with unusual series of doors topped by fanlights. *Photograph by Frank Cousins, 1891.*



Fence, with urns and front doorway, 1972. *Photographs, unless otherwise noted, are by Richard Merrill.*



West parlor, north wall. Details of Georgian paneling were accentuated with different colors during a nineteenth-century redecoration. *Photograph by Frank Cousins, 1913.*



West parlor, north wall, 1973



East parlor, north wall. *Essex Institute photo, 1939.*



East parlor, south wall, showing window settees made for the room and original pier glass, 1973



Northeast room, second floor, showing bed with carving attributed to Samuel McIntire, 1965



Second floor hallway, window with arched head, 1973



Front entry hall, 1965

*No. 9 Upper Entry*

[The central hallway on the third floor.]

1 book Case

1 set - 83 vols. Rees' Cyclopedias

*No. 10 North West upper Chamber*

[On the third floor.]

1 Kidderminster Carpet - 10 yds.	Newspapers
1 Desk	1 set Bed Curtains
1 book Case	12 blankets
4 Chairs	1 Quilt
1 looking Glass	1 Harrateen Suit
6 Pictures	1 suit canopy bed Curtains
2 window Curtains	1 Cornice
1 Desk	1 bedstead Cornice &c.

*No. 11 Southwest Chamber*

[Also on the third floor.]

1 Venetian Carpet - 20 yds.	1 set canopy bed Curtains
1 Table	Chest Tassels Fringe &c.
4 Chairs	1 Feather Bed 58 lbs.
1 Table & box	1 Canopy Bedstead
1 Glass	(6 flag [illegible])
1 green Quilt	(*) 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ yds. Russia Sheeting
3 Coverlids	

*No. 12 Unfinished Chambers*

[These objects were probably in the northeast room on the second floor, and the two rooms on the east side of the third floor, as these are the only upstairs rooms yet to be mentioned.]

6 flag Bottom Chairs	2 window Cornices
1 trundle Bedstead	1 bed Frame
1 Feather Bed - 59 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs.	bench box &c.
1 Bedstead & straw Bed	1 book Case
1 Feather Bed - 49 lbs.	2 bush. meal
1 bag of Feathers - 59 "	meal Chest & box

### No. 13 Pantries

[These pantries, along with the "inner Kitchen" and "kitchen" must have been at the back of the house on the first floor, but whether they were on the east or west side, or perhaps in the one-story addition, remains an unanswered question. Numerous pots, skillets, kettles, pans, and other cooking equipment are listed here, suggesting that these rooms included the cooking fireplace and oven which are located in the northeast room.]

1 Tin Tube	3 sets candle moulds
2 fry Pans - 1	1 Tin Fender
1 Digester	Waiter of Tin Ware
1 pot & Kettle	1 Tin Kitchen
1 Griddle & Kettle	1 Do.
1 Tea Kettle	7 flat & 1 Italian Iron
2 iron Skillets	9 ps. Stove Ware
1 pr. Dogs	1 Table & Waiter
1 Firkin of Limes	4 green Chairs
bucket Cooler & contents	2 mats
1 brass Kettle	bread Tub [illegible] &c.
1 Furnace	bbl. pul. Ginger
4 iron [illegible]	" Casks
1 pan 4 ps. tin	" Salt
1 Do. 3 " Do.	30 ps. earthen Ware
Stove & (Callender)	9 baskets
Lot of Pewter	4 Pots—Rice, Beans &c.
1 brass Skillet	1 ax—15 lbs. Sperm Candles
bread Tub— 6 ps. tin &c.	2 mats
Cheese box	1 stool
2 [illegible] Coffee Pot &c.	1 pr. Scales
Tin Pan & Cake Tins	22 lbs. small weights
4 ps. Tin	(1 Clothes Horse & iron'g
Tub of Do.	board)
8 bread Tins	

### No. 14 Kitchen

[Again, the precise location of this room is somewhat unclear, but it was probably located with the "Pantry" and "inner

Kitchen" at the back of the house. The possibility exists that this "kitchen," as opposed to the "inner Kitchen," was located in a small building outside the main house.]

2 painted Tables &c.	8½ "	Mould Do.
5 Chairs	6 "	Pepper
ullage bbl. of Flour	1	Gridiron
1 pr. Garden Shears	1	pr. Dogs
1 Engine	1	Churn— (*) 1 Pestle & Mortar
Skewers Coffee Mills &c.		Lime, Seed, & Sugar
Toaster Coffee Mill &c.		1 Fire Set
19 lbs. Chocolate		4 Brushes & 4 Brooms
basket of Sundries		1 Russia Fruit Basket
14½ lbs. Lump Sugar		
14½ " Sperm Candles		

#### No. 15 outside

[A group of odds and ends scattered around the outside of the house.]

Lot of Lumber	Buckets &c.
1 pr. Steps— (*) 2 Ladders	1 Washing Machine
Plant Glass Covers	Lot of Lumber
1 Wheelbarrow	1 Washing Machine
1 bath tub (*) Lot of Pots	Chair Covers &c.
2 old Laddles	Garden Tools
2 halters	Carpenters Do.
1 Blanket	2 pr. of Steps
1 net	(Lot of Wood Chips &c.)
1 Bridle	" " Lumber
1 Table & Contents	1 Settle
bbl. of Bran.	11 boxes Firkins &c.

#### No. 16 Flowers. Pots. &c.

[On June 2, 1809, Jerathmiel placed the following advertisement in the *Salem Gazette*, evidence of his affection for these garden plants and flowers:

## TEN DOLLARS REWARD

Whereas some vile, unprincipled person, entered the yard of the subscriber on the night of the 15th inst., and maliciously broke the branch of a running Vine, pulled up and carried off the roots belonging to the same. Anyone that will give information of the wretch so that he may receive punishment justly due to such an offender will receive the above reward.<sup>36</sup>

The presence of slips and empty pots and benches in the list below may be an indication that Jerathmiel used part of the house as a greenhouse, perhaps the one-story addition at the back of the house.]

1 multa Flora Rose	No. 1
1 Laurestinns	2
1 white stalk Jelly Flower	3
1 Lobe Plant	4
1 Rose Geranium	5
1 Orange Tree	6
1 yellow Chrysanthemum	7
1 China Rose	8
1 Scarlet Geranium	9
1 silver leaf Do.	10
1 Washingtonian Do.	11
3 monthly Roses	12, 13, 14
1 Verbena	15
1 Scarlet leaf Geranium	16
1 Large myrtle.	17
1 small Do.	18
1 superb Geranium	19
1 Vine leaf Do.	20
2 small Laurestinns slips	21, 22
2 arianders	23, 24
5 empty Pots	
3 Benches	

36. This advertisement has been reprinted in Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, p. 400.

*No. 17 House Cellar*

old Bench	Lot Tin—Pots &c.
2 bbls. Soap	Firkin of Butter
1 long Bench	2 Cannisters of Oil
1 Tin Tub	3 pots of Fat & 1 bbl.
1 Safe	2 ullage bbls. of Pork
1 bread Tub & horse [?]	1 " " " Sand
1 bbl. Cider	3 bbls. Potatoes &c.
box & brush	box & tub
6 Tubs	(*) 61 bottles
1 empty Cask	7 earthen Pots
3 buckets—1 Firkin	

*No. 18 Lower floor of Store*

[The store was located at the back of the house, in a separate building.]

4 bbls. & 1 iron Pot of Sundries
1 " lbs. Turkey Stools [?]
1 Chest & Provision Block
1 hhd. 21 gallons. molasses
Glass nails Sign chair &c.
7 gin Cases
6 best Casks No. 1
10 Do. -2
15 Do. -3
30 Do. -4
5 Casks of Vinegar
Cask of Lime & Fish
85 lbs. Sheet Iron
176 " wrought Do.
1 Scale beam & Scales
14-56-1: 112-1-28 lbs. weights
1 Nail Drawer
21 Boxes & 3 Rudders
20 Lights & Sashes
Lot of Dye Wood
" " Bottles, Pot, Demijohn &c.

### No. 19 Counting Room

[The "ship Friendship" mentioned here was probably a model or pictorial representation of the actual ship. The Institute exhibited a simulated counting house in one of the stable rooms for several years.]

1 Desk	5 Chairs & 1 Table
3 Spy Glasses	2 Stools
1 book Case	ink Stands &c. on desk
Chart of World	3 [illegible] &c.
Town of Salem	Fire Set. Fenders. Bellows &c.
Ship Friendship	

### No. 20 Middle Floor

18 boxes	Beans and Brimstone
Lot of Mats	21 lbs of Lead
yellow ochre	Tea Kettle cast 28 lbs. copper
Horns	5 Meal Bags
Lot of Sundries	Tin Cannister Duck &c.
" " Bags	

### No. 21 Upper Loft

Blunderbuss. boxes. Washg machines	
Shingles & Doors &c. No. 2	
Cabin Doors. old Parceling &c.	-3
Carriage Wheels & blocks	-4
Pump Gear	-5
Stoves & Clapboards	-6
Gun apparatus &c.	-7
Lumber	-8
Cork. Canvass. Carpets &c.	-9
Blocks. Dead Eyes &c.	-10
bbl. Doors & Cabin Windows	-11
[illegible] of bags. mats. &c	-12
bbls. of Paint Pots &c.	-13
Caps. Cross Trees. &c.	-14
21 bbls.	-15
Lot of Timber outside —	
Hoops. Posts. &c. —	

### *Store Cellar*

1 Ladder on east side [?]  
box Posts &c.  
" " paint pots &c.  
31 Lime Casks. Lumber under  
1 ullage bbl. of Cider  
Brooms Lumber &c. on south side  
Lot of Bean Poles  
1 Ladder  
9 large Casks & lumber under  
41 bbls. " Do.  
1 Pitch Pot  
balance in Cellar, Tubs, &c.  
(\*) Rocks

### *Garden Tools*

[Listed in pencil on the last page are the following tools, which probably form a detailed list of the tools included in No. 15, "outside."]

1 Hatchet & 2 axes	1 beetle & wedges
1 Crow Bar	4 Scrapers
6 Rakes & 2 hoe handles	3 Shovels & 3 Spades
3 Dung & pitch forks	1 Saw & Horse
3 Hoes	3 basket 1 Water Pot etc.
1 adze	2 Scythes 1 Snaith &c.

This list presents as complete a house inventory as we are likely to get, and also provides some interesting material for the continued restoration and furnishing of the house. Fortunately, perhaps because they were purchased by George Johonnot or other family members, several of these items found their way back into the hands of the Peirce-Nichols family, and occupy their original positions in the house today.

The loss of his familiar home and possessions was a great blow to the aging Jerathmiel. He only lived a short time after his departure from the house, and died on August 21, 1827, of "angina pectoria." Despite his financial losses, which might have discredited him in a later era, he was recognized as one of Salem's "most respectable and worthy citizens."<sup>37</sup>

37. Jerathmiel's obituary appeared in the *Salem Gazette*, August 21, 1827. The cause of his death is given in the Salem vital records.

With its purchase by George Johonnot, the Peirce-Nichols House left the family hands for the one and only time in its history prior to its acquisition by the Essex Institute. George Stuart Johonnot (1756-1836) and his wife, Martha, were wealthy friends of the Peirce-Nichols family, and their purchase of the house was a kindly gesture toward the temporarily destitute family. George was the son of Francis and Mary Johonnot of Boston, and he attended the Latin School there in 1765. He joined the Cadet Company during the Revolution, and afterwards moved to Salem, where he was a successful merchant and justice of the peace for several years.<sup>38</sup> His will, enacted after his death in 1836, bequeathed the Peirce-Nichols House to George Nichols, with the stipulation that his "beloved wife Martha shall have during her life the full, free and unmolested possession of the dwelling house, its appendages, yard, garden and furniture." The house and land were valued at \$5,000 at this time. Other parts of Johonnot's estate, which totaled \$75,000, went to John Clark, his domestic servant, and to the County of Essex, for the benefit of the "Insane Poor" of the County.<sup>39</sup>

Martha's marriage to George Johonnot was her third.<sup>40</sup> In her will, she followed the wishes of her husband by making further provision for the return of the house to the Peirce-Nichols family:

I give and devise to George Nichols of Salem the mansion house now occupied by me and the land under and adjoining the same, with the same limits as formerly owned by Jerathmeel Peirce deceased to have and hold the same to the said Nichols to his use for and during his natural life and after his decease to the daughters of said George for their use forever.<sup>41</sup>

This bequest was put into effect after Martha's death on May 26, 1840, and George Nichols, with his second wife, Betsey, and his children from his first marriage to Sally Peirce, returned to live in the house.

By 1840 George Nichols, whom we have already encountered

38. The best sources of information on the Johonnots are: Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, p. 407; *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 36 (April 1900), 106-107; and *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 7 (1853), 143-144.

39. Essex County Probate Records, Docket no. 15169.

40. She had previously been married to William Pynchon and Joseph Grafton.

41. Essex County Probate Records, Docket no. 15170.

briefly before, had lived an exciting and diversified life.<sup>42</sup> Few people have lived in as many important "historic" houses as did George Nichols. He was born on the Fourth of July, 1778, in the Richard Derby house in Salem. Before he was a year old, his father, Ichabod Nichols, took the family to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where they lived in the Wentworth-Gardner House until 1793. The family moved back to Salem at that time, and George spent most of the next ten years at sea, pausing long enough to marry Sally Pierce in 1801. George and Sally began married life in a house at the corner of Washington and Federal (then County) Streets, but with George's retirement from the sea "with great relief" in 1804, they moved to a house at 116-118 Federal Street, which they shared with Benjamin and Lydia (Nichols) Peirce, Sally's brother and George's sister. In 1811 the peripatetic couple moved again, this time to the corner of Essex and Munroe Streets, and by 1816 George and Sally were living in the large brick dwelling at 37 Chestnut Street. By the time of his bankruptcy in 1826, they had moved once more, this time to Warren Street, where they were joined by Jerathmiel and Betsey Peirce. This was to be Sally's last home, as she died in 1835 "after an illness of a few days," and in September of 1836, George married Sally's sister Betsey Peirce. After the death of Martha Johonnot, George and Betsey returned to the house at 80 Federal Street where George "as a young man had passed so many happy hours, where he married his first wife and where his second wife was born."<sup>43</sup> George spent the remaining twenty-five years of his life in the Peirce-Nichols House, enjoying the garden in his retirement.

When George was eighty years old, he dictated a brief autobiography to his granddaughter Martha Nichols, which she edited and published in the early twentieth century. This excellent and entertaining little book is nevertheless incomplete in many respects, and fortunately many of its gaps have been filled by the letters and other documents published by Susan Nichols Pulsifer in her study of the Peirce-Nichols family. All of this material portrays George as an adventurous, but on

42. Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, Chapter 10, "George—Father and Son," and Supplement 3, concerning George and Sally Nichols, and Nichols, *George Nichols*, are the best sources of biographical material concerning this member of the Nichols family. The various collections of Nichols family manuscripts at the Essex Institute and Peabody Museum of Salem are rich in material concerning nearly every member of the family, particularly those who lived in the Peirce-Nichols House.

43. Nichols, *George Nichols*, p. 86.

the whole sober and industrious fellow. He seemed to be accident prone as a child, but survived his spills and near-drownings well enough, and by age sixteen he had expressed a desire to go to sea.<sup>44</sup> His wish was granted, and his voyages between 1795 and 1804 took him to Copenhagen, Saint Petersburg, Bombay, London, Batavia, Amsterdam, Sumatra, and other places remote from Salem. While these trips proved George to be a brave and resourceful voyager, and brought him a handsome reward, he felt that "the sea-faring life to the most rugged young men is really a miserable Dog's life,"<sup>45</sup> and after his last voyage he "never felt any desire to cross the Atlantic."<sup>46</sup>

Once on dry land for good, George engaged in commerce with his father and his brother-in-law Benjamin Peirce. They prospered, and at the beginning of the War of 1812, George considered himself a rich man, estimating his worth at \$40,000. The war cut deeply into this fortune, and George stated: "I lost in it [the war] nearly one-half of all my property, notwithstanding I had a great deal of insurance. Every vessel in which I was concerned was captured."<sup>47</sup> George felt that privateering was wrong, and did not engage in it during the war. At the close of hostilities, George resumed business, and "for several years affairs went on somewhat prosperously." This prosperity was ephemeral, however, for there quickly came a "long series of disasters" and "ruinous voyages," all the "effect of bad management."<sup>48</sup> By 1826 George was literally broke, as were many of his close relatives, including his father-in-law, Jerathmiel Peirce.

George quickly divided up his property among his creditors, and after a short period of meditation and reflection, he "decided to engage in the auction and brokerage business." In this capacity he supervised the sale of Jerathmiel's household goods. After fifteen years at his new trade, George had repaid many of his debts, and he felt that his "change of fortune has proved one of the greatest blessings of my life."<sup>49</sup> He remained active in this business until he was nearly seventy years of age.

44. See the letter of Ichabod Nichols to John Nichols, printed in Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, p. 72.

45. Letter of George Nichols to John Nichols, November 1797, printed in Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, p. 104.

46. Nichols, *George Nichols*, p. 69.

47. Nichols, *George Nichols*, p. 80.

48. Nichols, *George Nichols*, p. 80.

49. Nichols, *George Nichols*, p. 81.

At his death in 1865 he was eulogized as "a gentleman distinguished alike for purity of character, honorable and conscientious dealing, benevolence of heart, and the faithful discharge of every duty."<sup>50</sup>

Nine children were born to George and Sally, eight of whom lived to maturity; George and Betsey were childless. George's will established a trust for the benefit of his four unmarried daughters: Elizabeth Peirce, Lydia Ropes, Mary Jane, and Sarah Peirce.<sup>51</sup> These four sisters, all over fifty years of age by this time, were known as the "Aunties," and they inherited the Peirce-Nichols House and lived there until their respective deaths. Probably the most interesting, and certainly the most peculiar of the group was Sarah, who for reasons best known to herself walked many miles throughout Salem each day. On rainy days she would pace back and forth in the barn, in order to keep up her mileage. She became quite noted for this walking habit, and her perambulations were one of the familiar sights of the town. Like any self-respecting eccentric, she kept an account of her miles walked, and after her death in 1879 it was computed that she had covered some 150,000 miles in her daily walks.<sup>52</sup>

Sarah's sister Lydia died in 1894, and she was followed by Elizabeth in 1897. Mary Jane, the last of the "Aunties" to die, passed away in 1902.

In 1888 another of George's children, John H. Nichols (1811-1898), had returned to Salem to live in the Peirce-Nichols House, bringing his own unmarried daughters with him. John H. had worked in his father's business until 1866, when he moved with his family to New York City. He married Sarah Augusta Leach in 1835, and they had six children, including the three daughters—Martha, Charlotte Sanders, and Sarah Augusta—who would become known as the "Maidens." These daughters traveled with their parents in Europe for two years, and returned with them to a new home in South Wilton, Connecticut, where the family lived from 1876 to 1888. John H.'s wife died in 1885, and three years later he sold the house in South Wilton and returned to his native city to retire. He spent the last ten years of his life in the Peirce-Nichols House.<sup>53</sup>

50. From his obituary in the *Salem Gazette*, printed in Nichols, *George Nichols*, pp. 88-89.

51. Essex County Probate Records, Docket no. 48188.

52. Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, p. 423. The "Aunties" are described on p. 419.

53. John Nichols legally added the H. to his name in 1828. The best account of his life is his obituary in the *Salem Gazette*, September 16, 1898, reprinted in Pulsifer, *Witch's*

His spinster daughters would also play out their lives within its walls, forming the second generation of maiden occupants. As Martha phrased it, "Cupid passed by this house with drooping wings and averted eyes."<sup>54</sup> These ladies lived on in the fading splendor of their family home, which had already been recognized as an architectural gem of unusual merit. Frank Cousins recorded the appearance of the house in a series of remarkable photographs (copies of which are at the Essex Institute), and these helped educate the public as to the beauty and importance of the house.<sup>55</sup>

As they grew older, the sisters searched for a buyer who would preserve their home and relieve them of the financial burden of operating it. William Sumner Appleton, founder of the newly organized Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, stated in 1914 that the Peirce-Nichols House was "just the kind of house" his Society should own,<sup>56</sup> and his interest was made public in a *Salem Evening News* article of March 18, 1914. In July of that year, Charlotte Nichols wrote to one of her cousins explaining that the Essex Institute had also expressed an interest in purchasing and preserving the house.<sup>57</sup> The Institute was apparently unwilling to let such an important house slip out of its grasp, and quickly appointed a committee of William Crowninshield Endicott, John Robinson, and Stephen W. Phillips to investigate the feasibility of the Institute's acquiring the house. Some hesitancy was expressed because the relief effort after the recent Salem fire and the war in Europe were absorbing most of the available charitable contributions, but by October of 1914, tentative arrangements had been made

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Breed, p. 372. Greater detail is provided by Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, Chapter 12, "John Henry and the Civil War," and Supplement 4.

54. Pulsifer, *Witch's Breed*, p. 398.

55. Ross Turner did a watercolor of the exterior of the Peirce-Nichols House as it appeared in 1893 which was exhibited at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, and remains in the Essex Institute collection today. Mary Harrod Northend, "The Pierce-Nichols House at Salem," *American Homes and Gardens*, 12 (June 1915), contains many photographs of the house, as does Leigh French, *Colonial Interiors: The Colonial and Early Federal Periods, First Series* (New York: Helburn, 1923).

56. *Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities*, Vol. 5, No. 1, serial number 10 (April 1914), front cover. Wallace Nutting intimated in a letter of October 17, 1914, to one of the Nichols sisters that he might be able to arrange the sale of the house to "the Society with the long name" (Nichols Family Manuscripts, Essex Institute).

57. Letter of July 21, 1914, in Box 10, Folder 4, Nichols Papers, Peabody Museum of Salem.

with the Nichols sisters for the transfer of the house to the Institute.<sup>58</sup> The Institute would pay the sisters \$10,000, absorb the additional expenses of maintaining such a large house, and guarantee life tenancy to the elderly sisters.

Once this arrangement had been agreed upon, the Institute began soliciting funds. The purchase price, and hence the goal of the fund-raising drive, was announced as \$18,000, but as the treasurer, Stephen W. Phillips, explained in a letter to William Sumner Appleton, this figure was not exactly correct. Phillips wrote:

I am very positive that we should not state the actual amount paid for the house which as a matter of fact is ten thousand dollars but I do not wish that sum to get in print for several very good reasons. We prefer to say in every case that the Institute insists upon eighteen thousand dollars at least with which to buy the house make some immediate needed repairs and to furnish a fund so that further appeals to the public will not be needed for years.<sup>59</sup>

Funds trickled in slowly, but by 1917, the sum of \$20,300 had been raised from sixty-seven different contributors.<sup>60</sup> By far the largest single donation, and the one which actually assured the preservation of the house, was a gift of \$8,000 from Willard Straight of New York City. Straight was a partner in the firm of J. P. Morgan and Company, and was distantly related to the Nichols sisters through a common great-great-grandmother. He had seen the Peirce-Nichols House, and felt it

58. See Stephen W. Phillips, "Memorandum of Conference between the Misses Nichols and Mr. Robinson and myself, October 24, 1914, at 80 Federal Street, Salem," in a group of manuscripts entitled "Correspondence to Stephen W. Phillips, 1916. *Re: Purchase & preservation of the Peirce-Nichols House,*" at the Essex Institute. Another group of papers at the Institute entitled "Accounts, vouchers, etc. *Re: Fund raising & repairing of the Peirce-Nichols house, 1917-18,*" and Box 10, Folder 4, of the Nichols Papers at the Peabody Museum of Salem contain numerous letters and documents in which one can trace the transfer of the house to the Institute.

59. Letter of November 1, 1916, Geographic File, Peirce-Nichols House, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. This interesting means of fund raising has been discussed by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., in his *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States before Williamsburg* (New York: Putnams, 1965), p. 295. Phillips' fears were well grounded, for the public did not respond to an additional appeal for funds in 1918 (*Essex Institute Annual Report, 1919*, p. 9).

60. *Essex Institute Annual Report, 1917*, pp. 7-9, contains a list of the contributors.

was worthy to be saved "as an example to the architects and builders of the future."<sup>61</sup>

On March 10, 1917, the Nichols sisters deeded the house to the Institute "out of a desire to preserve to posterity the beautiful house designed by McIntire and built by our great-grandfather Jerathmeel Peirce and long associated with the Nichols family."<sup>62</sup> The house was to be used by the Institute "for educational purposes as a fine example of Colonial [sic] architecture," and was to "be open to the inspection of the public upon such terms and conditions as said Essex Institute may determine." The remaining sisters, Martha and Charlotte Sanders, were allowed to remain in their house, and the Peirce-Nichols House did not come under the complete control of the Institute until after the death of Charlotte Sanders Nichols in 1935.

### III

The Peirce-Nichols House survived well intact into the twentieth century, and few major changes were necessary in the course of restoring the house. When the house was initially received by the Institute in 1917, some cleaning, painting, and papering was done on the inside, and

The outside repairs consisted of a thorough overhauling of the woodwork replacing many details which were found to be unsound and rotting and replacing the columns in the front porch and repairing and tinning the top of the elaborate railing around the roof, some very objectionable brackets which had been put on at the time the bay window was built were removed and a dentelle moulding in keeping with the style of the house was substituted.<sup>63</sup>

61. *Essex Institute Annual Report*, 1917, p. 8. See also a letter from Straight to Stephen Phillips, January 6, 1917, in "Correspondence . . . Re: Purchase & preservation of the Peirce-Nichols House," Essex Institute, and an additional letter from Straight to William Sumner Appleton, May 23, 1914, Geographic File, Peirce-Nichols House, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. A photograph of Straight's own colonial revival house, built in New York City in 1914, appears in Walter C. Kidney, *The Architecture of Choice: Eclecticism in America 1880-1930* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), illustration 109.

62. Essex County Registry of Deeds, Book 2359, leaf 219.

63. See the report prepared by Stephen Phillips entitled "Report of the Repairs at the Peirce-Nichols House, Salem, January 1, 1918," in "Accounts . . . Re: Fund raising & repairing of the Peirce-Nichols House," Essex Institute.

In 1924-1925 the architect William Gibbons Rantoul, who later would supervise the architectural restoration of the Gardner-Pingree House, was called upon to repair the fence which ran across the front of the house. Parts of the original fence, which was probably built in 1801, were found stored in the outbuildings, and these along with the original urns guided Rantoul in his restoration.<sup>64</sup>

Even though the house was open to the public by appointment, few changes in the furnishings could be made while the Nichols sisters were alive and using the house as their residence. Once the Institute received control of the house in 1935, some confusion as to how best to operate and interpret the house arose. The natural response was to appoint a committee to investigate the matter, and in 1939 Howard Corning, Secretary of the Institute, made the following progress report. First,

a committee, consisting of Mr. J. Newton Smith, Mr. J. Frederick Hussey and Mr. Richard H. Wiswall, gave its time and money to putting the house in habitable shape. When this had been done, Miss Harriet Rantoul, Miss Elizabeth Coggin and Mrs. J. Newton Smith furnished the parlour, dining room, one bedroom and the hall (all the rooms which are open to the public), using furniture, pictures and ornaments which had been in the house or else came from our museum. If that was not adequate, they provided it themselves.<sup>65</sup>

Resident caretakers looked after the house, and guided visitors through. Much the same system and philosophy were used for the restoration of the Gardner-Pingree House, conducted at about the same time, and are in practice today, except that more rooms are open to the public. Generous friends of the Institute, including Mrs. Louise duPont Crowninshield, continued to donate suitable objects to the house. As in the other houses of the Essex Institute, the furnishings in the Peirce-Nichols House reflect more than one period of time, demonstrating not only the continuing generations who lived there, but also the architectural evolution of the house.

In the western Georgian parlor, furniture of the Chippendale style is arranged in a comfortable setting. A generous easy chair is surrounded by side chairs in the late Chippendale style, straight-legged, uncarved,

64. Kimball, *McIntire*, p. 59.

65. *Essex Institute Annual Report*, 1939, p. 16; see also pp. 14-15.

yet with elaborately pierced splats. Upon a drop-leaf table, with the attenuated legs and well-articulated ball-and-claw feet associated with furniture of the North Shore area, rests an enormous Chinese export porcelain punch bowl, a symbol of wealth and grandeur when it was originally brought back to Salem in the early nineteenth century. The room is dominated by a large, tall case clock of exceptional craftsmanship and similar in design to one on the stair landing. The clockworks were made in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1727, while the cabinet was probably made in the Boston–North Shore area about 1800. The original brass finials have at some time been replaced by a carved eagle flanked by flame finials.

The stair hall and the eastern parlor have been furnished in the neoclassical style. Side chairs made in Salem date from 1800–1810, the era of peak production and extensive wealth in the town. A handsome Empire-style sofa of about 1820 also reflects the skill of Salem's cabinetmakers and carvers. Above the sofa hangs a large painting of a classical scene, probably copied from an engraving of the period, by the Salem artist George Ropes. Originally a fireboard in the "best room," it was framed by Charlotte Nichols in 1899 as a Christmas present to her Aunt Mary.<sup>66</sup> Heavy girandole mirrors, about 1810, complement the painting with their classical detail and form.

A most exciting and unique element in the furnishings of the Peirce-Nichols House is the number of original pieces still in the house. Other objects associated with the family, such as fire buckets, a porcelain chocolate set, and other incidental memorabilia of daily living, as well as numerous portraits, have been later returned to the house by members of the family. The eastern Adamesque drawing room contains much of its original furniture made in 1801 at the time the room was redecorated for the wedding of Sally and George Nichols. The skill and design genius of the architect, Samuel McIntire, has pulled the entire interior space together. The settees in the windows and recesses on either side of the chimney were originally described as "patch cover'd," indicating they were upholstered in one of the copperplate-printed materials popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Carved with stylized rosettes and acanthus leaves, they have quite naturally been attributed to McIntire, as have the armchairs in the room. The three arm-

66. Family tradition recorded in the museum file; a nearly identical fireboard is in the Stephen Phillips Trust House, 34 Chestnut Street, Salem.

chairs, part of an original set of twelve,<sup>67</sup> are derived from Sheraton's *Drawing Book*, plate 33. There is a bold, if sometimes awkward, spatial relationship established between the various parts of the chair which are carved, turned, and squared. The star-punched background, carved bowknots, and pendant bellflowers are always associated with McIntire's production. In addition to these chairs and the settees, the chimney glass and matching pier glass at either end of the room were also purchased for this room; the chimney glass has never been removed from its place. It has been suggested that they may be English or French, although they could also be of American craftsmanship, as equally elaborate-looking glasses were made in such places as Boston, New York, or Albany.<sup>68</sup> They are a rare survival, and the brilliance of their gilt and glass contrasts with the austerity of McIntire's refined classical woodwork details, creating important accents in the long rectangular room.

The gilded eagle on the stair landing was once at the peak of the barn roof in back of the house, but has since been removed for safety. It is one of several in the collections at the Essex Institute attributed to McIntire. In the second-floor hall hang portraits of Betsey and George Nichols. A large settee with caned seat and matching side chairs was probably made in the Boston area. The design of Gothic arches contained within a rigid rectangle of the back is typical of settees and side chairs in Sheraton's "Gothic" style. These particular examples are painted black and decorated with small flowers. A handsome desk-and-bookcase dominates the end of the hall. With its bracket feet, serpentine front, glass doors, and well-carved pediment, it has characteristics of both the Chippendale and Sheraton styles.

In the eastern chamber, also refurbished in the neoclassical manner in 1801, is a large bed probably made at that time. It appears in the 1826 inventory as "1 mahogany highpost Bedstead" and it was furnished with "1 set patch Bed Curtains. Counterpane" and "1 Down Bed Pillows & Bolster - 44 lbs." The foot posts of the bed are richly carved with acanthus leaves, roses, and swags, and the carving has been attributed to McIntire. The block-front chest-on-chest, 1770-1785, was made in Essex County, probably in Marblehead, as it bears great similarity to two chest-on-chests in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Bos-

67. Charles F. Montgomery, *American Furniture: The Federal Period (1788-1825)* (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), catalogue number 23.

68. Charles F. Montgomery, *American Furniture . . .*, catalogue number 235.

ton.<sup>69</sup> It is a well-integrated piece, with its very shallow blocking, straight bracket feet, fluted pilasters, and well-carved shell motif on the central top drawer. The top of the small block-front bureau may have been replaced at some point, as its overhang seems exaggerated for its diminutive size.

The western chamber is now furnished as a sitting room, with Sheraton-style sofa, side chairs, and small desk and bookcase. An ingenious traveling desk, made in China of exotic woods, was brought to this country about 1810 by Captain William Cleveland. When the first level of shelves and drawers is opened up, the piece becomes a washstand; when the entire back part is pulled up, it becomes a desk.<sup>70</sup> Many objects in this room have Peirce-Nichols family associations, including the clothing hanging in the closet and the small pieces of needlework. An exquisite small embroidery done in the tent stitch with bright English wools was made by great-great-Aunt Sarah Ropes about 1730, according to an inscription on the back of the frame. It is small touches such as these family pieces which provide an added vitality to the restoration.<sup>71</sup>

There is general agreement that the house was originally covered with a coat of red paint, but there exists a division of opinion as to whether this red coating was ever visible, or was merely the priming coat for the white coat which the house had for many years.<sup>72</sup> It has even been suggested that the house was originally painted red, which was changed to white during the 1801 remodeling. The house was painted its present color, mustard yellow, in 1967, and was repainted in 1974.

When George Francis Dow restored the John Ward House (after

69. Richard H. Randall, Jr., *American Furniture in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1965), catalogue numbers 40, 41. See also Dean A. Fales, Jr., *Essex County Furniture: Documented Treasures from Local Collections 1660-1860* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1965), catalogue number 75.

70. See Carl Crossman, *The China Trade* (Princeton: The Pyne Press, 1972), illustration 129, for view of the desk fully open.

71. Photographs of the restored Peirce-Nichols House have appeared in a number of publications, including: Samuel Chamberlain, *Salem Interiors* (New York: Hastings House, 1950), pp. 68-78, 176, and copyright page; Richard Pratt, *A Treasury of Early American Homes* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949), pp. 98-99. Helen Comstock selected the southeast room on the second floor for inclusion in her *100 Most Beautiful Rooms in America* (New York: Studio, 1958), p. 166.

72. Various opinions are expressed in correspondence contained in the folder for the Peirce-Nichols House in the Essex Institute museum files.

1684) between 1910 and 1912, he made a careful examination of the documentary and physical evidence concerning this dwelling. In some respects, particularly his failure to make an adequate record of the changes made to the house during the course of restoration, his work fell short of modern standards. But the overall quality of Dow's efforts was not surpassed at the Essex Institute until the restoration of the Crowninshield-Bentley House (1727-1729) in 1959-1960, largely conducted by Abbott Lowell Cummings and former Institute director Dean A. Fales, Jr.

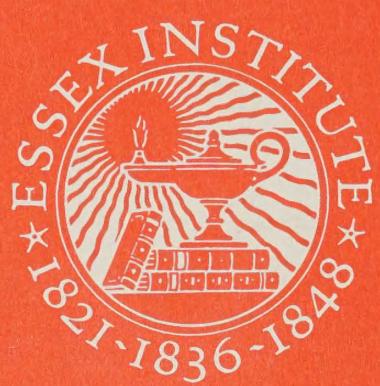
The Peirce-Nichols House (and the Gardner-Pingree House) were not so much restored as they were decorated, and there remains a wealth of information to be gained from a close examination and analysis of these two splendid McIntire houses. The 1827 inventory printed here raises as many questions as it provides answers concerning the possible methods of furnishing and interpreting the Peirce-Nichols House. No more worthwhile puzzle and project for the Institute than evaluating and exploring these possibilities could be found.







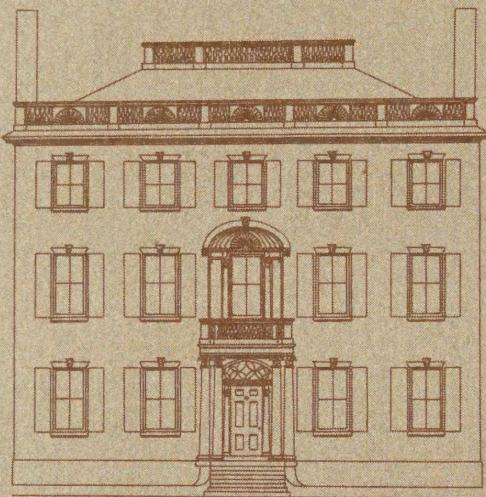




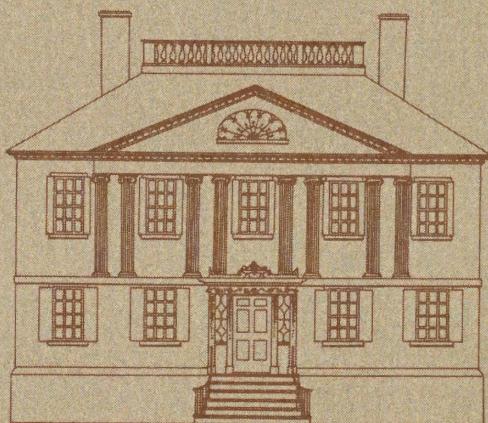


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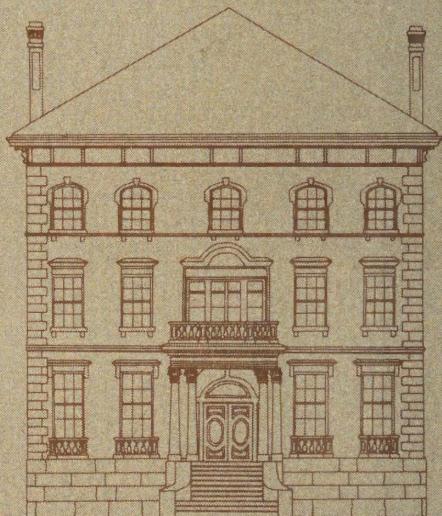
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